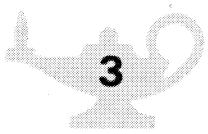
The Liquidation of the Basmachi Resistance, 1918—1933



Bolshevik Russia's war against the Basmachis (the Central Asian resistance) constituted a complex military, social, and political struggle that in important ways foreshadowed the multidimensional nature of modern conflicts involving developed powers in regions of the Third World. Lasting roughly from 1918 to 1933, the conflict reflected both continuities and significant departures in the history of Russia's Central Asian relations. The roots of the conflict can be traced to Russia's conquest of the region. Between the Russian conquest and the outbreak of World War I, the rapid expansion of cotton cultivation and associated industries, extensive Russian settlement, and repeated episodes of inept or corrupt administration disrupted traditional native living patterns and stirred bitter resentment. Festering social tensions helped ignite the conflict and gave impetus to incipient Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic tendencies.[1]

The imposition of Red rule in Central Asia also marked a historic first attempt by the Bolsheviks to extend their revolutionary order beyond the cultural frontiers of Europe into Muslim Asia. Central Asians little understood the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, though most applauded the collapse of imperial power. Nonetheless, Bolshevism held an appeal for Westernized members of the native intelligentsia of Central Asia by virtue of its proclaimed respect for self-determination and equality among all subject nationalities of the former empire. That such respect was based upon the naive belief that the oppressed peoples would gladly join their fate to that of Red Russia soon resulted in the disillusionment of Bolsheviks and Central Asians alike. Another inevitable issue of contention between the Bolsheviks and Central Asians was the ideological hostility of the former to the religion and traditional patterns of social organization in Central Asia. Accordingly, the Bolsheviks found that in order to prosecute the war against the Basmachis successfully, it was necessary to mute or modify much of their political program.

The Basmachis, on their part, generally lacked a coherent organization or clear program. However, by positioning themselves to varying degrees as the defenders of local self-rule, traditional society, Pan-Turkism, and the Islamic faith, they assembled a dangerous, if fragmented, resistance move-

ment. For significant periods between 1918 and 1933, they denied the Red Army control of much of rural Central Asia. Furthermore, they severely tested the ability of Red Army commanders to adapt to irregular warfare in an alien cultural and geographical setting.

Overall, the Basmachi War posed several challenging problems for the Bolsheviks. First, the Red Army, through 1921, was concurrently engaged in a war against White counterrevolutionary forces and Poland. And physically isolated by White forces from the Central Asian theater until mid-1919, the Red Army leadership could neither direct the struggle against the Basmachis in its early stages nor contribute significant resources to the defense of Central Asia. Second, the geography of the Central Asian theater posed extraordinary and unfamiliar difficulties, requiring important Russian adaptations in tactics and logistics. Third, the cultural setting demanded that the Bolsheviks correctly assess the political, ethnic, and religious dimensions of the conflict and adapt their programs accordingly.

The Basmachi War in Perspective

Following the conquest of Central Asia, Russian imperial administration did not aggressively Russify the native populace, although it did endeavor to develop the regional economy. Rather, Russian immigrants congregated in a few major towns where industrial jobs awaited them and formed largely separate communities. The natives, in turn, lived according to their traditions, although modest numbers took jobs in new enterprises or even received a Russian education. Meanwhile, Russian institutions had only a slight influence on the local culture. A typical case in point was the Russian Army. Fearful that the natives would violently resent conscription, the War Ministry (with the exception of a few irregular cavalry formations) preserved a blanket exemption for Central Asians from military service.

Yet the immigration of Russians and other nonnatives into Central Asia presaged important demographic shifts. According to the imperial census of 1911, over 1.5 million Russians and other nonnatives had taken residence in the Kazakh steppe, where they constituted 41.5 percent of the population. A further 407,000 resided in Turkestan, to the south, where, although they made up only 6.4 percent of the population, their impact on urban development was noteworthy. Least affected were the lands of Bukhara, where immigrants made up only 1 percent of the 2.5 million inhabitants, and Khiva.[2] Natives and immigrants coexisted uneasily in cities, where factories began to transform the landscape. A bloody uprising in the city of Andizhan in 1898 evidenced mounting disgruntlement among the indigenous population.[3]

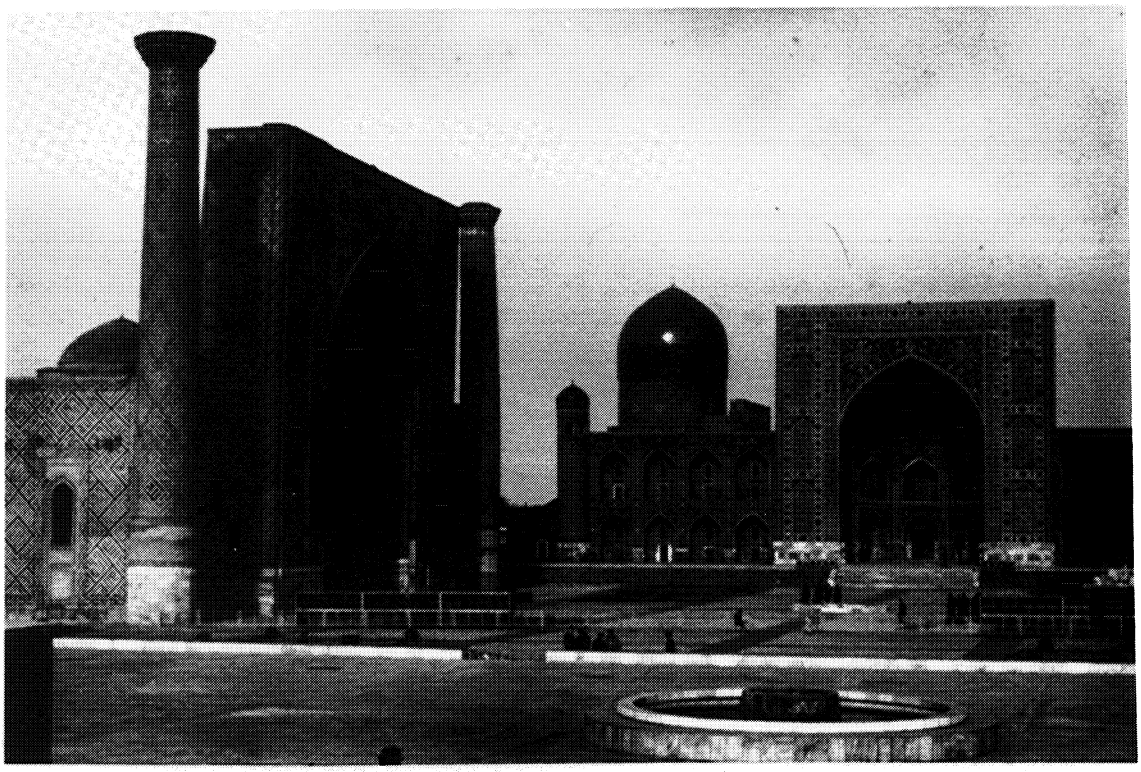
In the midst of World War I, when the slaughter on the Eastern Front created a critical shortage in Russian manpower, the government decided to draft Central Asians into labor battalions. A violent uprising subsequently ensued in Kazakhstan and spread like a brushfire into the Dzhiak district of Samarkand and the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan. By October

Governor General A. N. Kuropatkin served under Skobelev in Central Asia. He was war minister from 1898 to 1904 and governor general of Turkestan from 1916 to 1917.

1916, the total number of rebels approached 50,000, leading Aleksei N. Kuropatkin, the governor general of Turkestan (and Skobelev's former chief of staff), to plan a punitive expedition and the resettlement of rebellious tribes eastward into Kirghizia. Word of his intentions triggered a panic flight of Kazakhs and Kirghiz across the frontier into northwest China.[4]

The February 1917 Revolution interceded before Kuropatkin could implement his scheme, and a provisional government assumed power in St. Petersburg. A committee headquartered in Tashkent assumed authority in Turkestan at the behest of the new regime, but the momentum of events was already beyond control. Revolutionary upheaval gripped St. Petersburg, crippling the ability of the central government, whatever its makeup, to control events on the periphery of the empire. In Central Asia, the emerging political map devolved into a mosaic of autonomous factions and centers. In May 1917, inspired by a small, politically conscious elite, a congress of Muslim nationalities convened and issued a demand for the formation of an autonomous republic of Turkestan in federation with Russia. Many of these Muslim nationalists viewed socialism as the most likely path to autonomous national development and were not, at first, adversely disposed toward the Bolsheviks and other Russian socialists.[5] Independent political groups arose among the Russian population in Central Asia as well, and a Soviet (council) of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies dominated by Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (rivals of the Bolsheviks), formed in Tashkent.

The unstable political situation in Central Asia degenerated further after the October Bolshevik Revolution. Local Bolsheviks, disgruntled both with



Courtesy of Dr. Robert F. Baumann

The Registan complex in Samarkand, as restored during Soviet rule

their Russian socialist rivals and the Muslim congress, proclaimed their own Tashkent Soviet loyal to Lenin's regime in Moscow. In November, the Bolshevik Tashkent Soviet became the Council (Soviet) of Peoples' Commissars. Meanwhile, Muslim regimes formed in Bukhara and Khiva. Neither recognized Lenin's revolutionary government, whose influence would scarcely be felt in Central Asia before 1920. Similarly, a short-lived Islamic government formed in Kokand, calling for autonomy within a federated Russia.[6]

During the first half of the civil war against the White armies, Lenin's Bolshevik state was in constant peril, fighting an assortment of enemies on multiple fronts. Consequently, it had little hold over the former imperial borderlands of Central Asia, where the local Bolsheviks were geographically cut off from Moscow by White counterrevolutionary forces operating in the southern steppe and Siberia. Acting on their own, the Tashkent Bolsheviks clung to the absurd vision of creating a proletarian order in a region almost devoid of proletarian elements. Predominantly Russian in makeup and outlook, they promoted a revolutionary agenda scripted in code words rooted in the ideas of radical nineteenth-century European social theorists. Their efforts to realize their ideas could hardly fail to antagonize most of Central Asian society.

Yet because they were better armed and organized than other factions, the Tashkent Council of Peoples' Commissars gathered support among the Russian population and moved to liquidate its enemies. Red forces crushed the Muslim nationalist government in Kokand in January 1918. However,

they lacked the resources to overpower the new regimes in Bukhara and Khiva, and partisan warfare soon spread from the Fergana Valley and engulfed the Central Asian countryside.[7]

A 15 July telegram from the chairman of the Council of Peoples' Commissars representing the self-proclaimed Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic reflected the emerging crisis: "The Army is without ammunition and guns . . . the situation is catastrophic. In Ashkabad, the uprising has assumed grand proportions. Stores have been seized, government institutions have lost communications with Vernoe. Tashkent is cut off."[8] In August, the new government established the Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan Army to direct the war but faced a shortage of manpower. Red garrisons outside Tashkent were small and scattered (see table 3).[9] Still, by frantically raising local forces of all descriptions, the Tashkent Bolsheviks managed to establish a tenuous hold over a number of major cities and towns in Turkestan. In the countryside, Basmachi bands exploited the power vacuum to create centers of resistance.

TABLE 3
Composition of Russian Garrisons Outside Tashkent

Garrison	*Troops*	*Red Guards*	*Artillery*	*Machine Guns*
Skobelev	290		6 guns	4
Kokand	126	400	3 guns	4
Namangan	134		2 guns	4
Andizhan	168		2 guns	4
Osh	70			1

Source: Kh. Sh. Inoiatov, *Narody Srednei Azii v borbe protiv interventov i vnutrennei kontrrevoliutsii* (Moscow: Mysl, 1984), 31.

Ironically, some of the first Basmachis actually were outlaws loosely fitting the characterization applied in Red propaganda and later by Soviet historians. Two of the most prominent Basmachi leaders, Irgash and Madamin Bek, had been exiled by the imperial regime in 1913.[10] Still, at the root of the widespread resistance lay social dislocation and ethnic and religious tensions. The durability of the resistance was especially remarkable since the Basmachi bands possessed no common program and minimal political or military organization. Indeed, historian Richard Pipes describes the movement as "essentially a number of unconnected tribal revolts. . . ."[11] Mustafa Chokaev, briefly president of a provisional government in Kokand, recalled that the lack of a means of mass propaganda or a literate, politically conscious populace hampered efforts to organize the people.[12] In the end, the diverse and autonomous groups under the umbrella of the *Basmachestvo* shared little but a deep resentment of Russian domination and a fierce determination not to submit.

As a rule, the Basmachis were poorly armed. They carried a variety of mostly outdated side arms, among them many Berdan rifles of Russo-Turkish War (1877—78) vintage, and possessed a modest number of equally antiquated

artillery pieces. The Reds believed the Basmachis also received weapons from foreign (especially Britain) sources through Afghanistan, but there is little evidence that such assistance assumed significant proportions.[13] Indeed, the motley collection of weapons that the Basmachis actually employed in the field argues to the contrary.

If the quality of Basmachi arms was poor, the tactical coordination among their large groups was worse—a condition appallingly evident when they confronted Red units in the open field. As a result, even at the apex of their power, the Basmachis tended to rely on hit-and-run raids against factories or isolated Red garrisons. They generally withdrew in the face of superior force. Operating in small groups, they were tough and elusive and exploited three advantages associated with successful guerrilla operations: intimate knowledge of the terrain, superior mobility away from roads and towns, and active or passive support of the populace (which both shielded them and provided recruits). One Russian military observer, recording an impression that might as easily have come from the field in Algeria, Vietnam, or Afghanistan, said, "Without anything distinguishing them [the Basmachis] on the outside, clothed in the same way as the peasant population, they were all around our units, not hesitating to infiltrate, and unrecognizable and elusive, they devoted themselves to espionage that has no equal, whose network extends from the Afghan frontier to Tashkent."[14] The consequences manifested themselves in many ways. In one recorded instance, an armored train en route from Aidyn to Belak stopped at a prearranged signal and turned fifty boxes of ammunition over to the Basmachis.[15] On another occasion, a saboteur drugged the food of a small, besieged Red garrison, leaving only nine conscious defenders to hold the fort until relief came.[16]

The Central Asian Theater, 1919—22

Full-blown war in Turkestan did not begin until late 1919, after the Red Army broke the Whites' grip on Western Siberia, at which time, the physical isolation of Central Asia from Moscow ended. Anxious to take stock of the situation, Lenin's government in Moscow dispatched a six-member Turkestan Commission—including Fourth Army Commander Mikhail Frunze and Fourth Army Political Commissar V. V. Kuibyshev—to assume authority in Tashkent in November. The commission noted in its official assessment that existing party organizations lacked credibility with the masses, who little understood the Communist program.[17] The official newspaper of the Commissariat of Nationalities, *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, grimly acknowledged in March 1920 that overzealous local cadres had committed serious policy errors. The paper also unequivocally declared the Communist stake in Central Asia, saying: "Turkestan is the center of the dissemination of our ideas in the East. Turkestan is the flower garden from which the bees of surrounding countries of the East must receive their nourishment."[18]

At about the same time, Moscow recognized the need to bolster its military presence in Central Asia. On 24 March, Frunze informed Lenin by

telegram that the units of the recently organized (August 1919) Turkestan Front presented a "most wretched picture," and the troops were an "indescribable rabble." Red units were numerically weak, soldiers lacked uniforms, and (in the Fergana Valley) many had no shoes. Fully one-quarter of them carried old Berdan rifles, and another one-quarter used English weapons sent to Russia during World War I. A mere 4,500 infantrymen and 700 cavalrymen, some of whom would have been deemed too old or unfit for duty on other fronts, held the extensive First Army region from Termez (on the Afghan frontier) to Krasnovodsk.[19] Red units in Turkestan consisted of diverse elements, including so-called international regiments, organized from foreign prisoners taken during World War I, volunteer Muslim formations, and territorial Red Guards. Units arrived from Russia in random fashion, and in 1919, the staff of the Fergana Front had been unable to ascertain its own order of battle.[20] Aside from reorganization of the forces in the theater, Frunze found that his most pressing task was to raise proficient cavalry units capable of interdicting and pursuing Basmachi bands.

The Turkestan Front comprised two entire armies and elements of a third. The Fourth Army consisted of 3 rifle divisions (equipped with 203 machine guns) and reserves totaling 21,650 men. The First Army consisted of 3 rifle divisions and a Tatar Brigade, for a published strength of 32,129 men, 515 machine guns, and 99 field guns. Elements of the Eleventh Army based in Astrakhan contributed 17,236 men to the cause. In addition, during 1920—21, units of the Cheka (the original Soviet security forces) served under the Turkestan Front as well.[21] The actual strength of Red Army units varied from time to time and unit to unit. Frunze found, for example, upon reviewing the 2d Turkestan Division in 1920 that cavalry regiments ranged from 130 to 220 men and infantry regiments from 200 to 400.[22]

Red military initiatives against Khiva and Bukhara in 1920 were successful but did much to inflame existing ethnic and religious antagonisms. Khiva fell in February 1920. The Reds elevated the radical Young Khivans to power and proclaimed the Peoples Republic of Khorezm. A similar scenario unfolded in Bukhara. In August 1920, the Young Bukharans staged an uprising in Bukhara (city) and, according to a prearranged signal, called upon the Red Army for assistance to depose the emir.[23] In November, a treaty of cooperation cemented Bukhara's relationship to Soviet Russia.

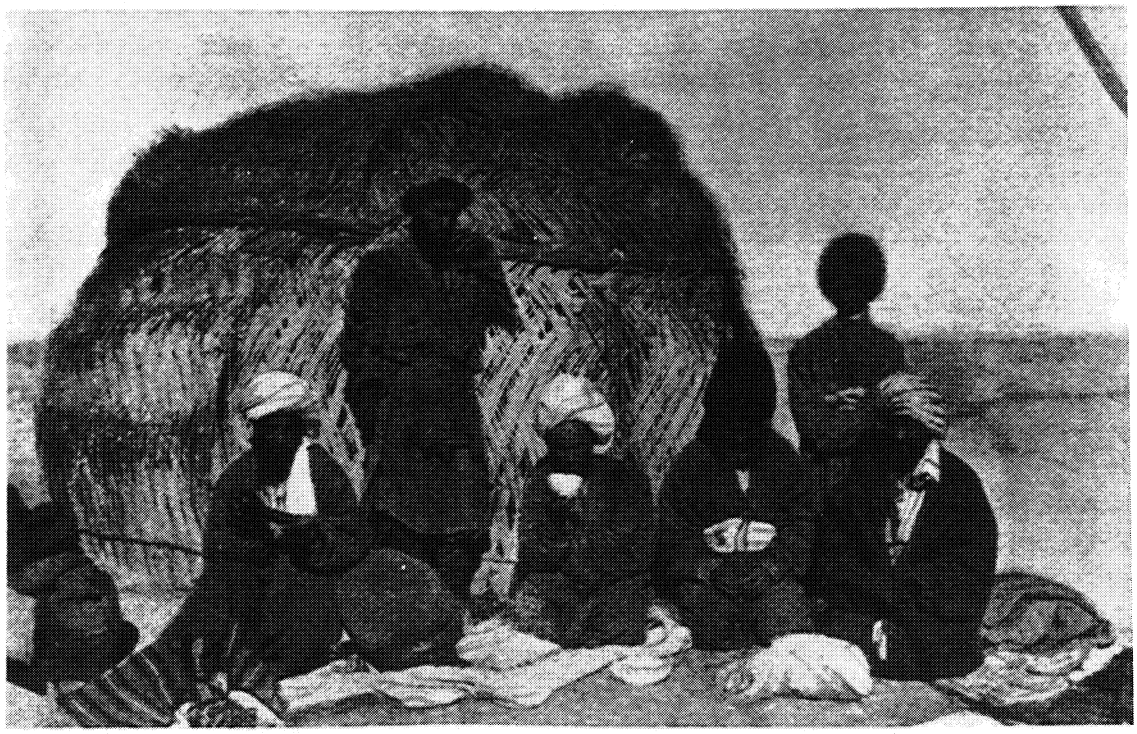
Notwithstanding military gains, Frunze determined that basic policy changes were essential to success in Central Asia. Lenin himself directed a series of conciliatory measures: the reopening of bazaars, equalization of food distribution, and recruitment of native party members. The Red Army dispatched the Tatar Brigade, raised among the Muslim Tatars of the central Volga region, to Turkestan, and Frunze raised "Soviet Basmachi" detachments, consisting in part of converted (or so he assumed) Basmachis.[24] In August 1920, the party central committee of Turkestan ordered the mobilization of 500 Muslim Communists in the Syr Darya, Samarkand, Fergana, and Transcaspia oblasts for assignment to companies and squadrons of the Red Army.[25]

Red organizational successes proved more illusory than real, however. The proclamation of the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, a secular state, sparked discontent throughout Bukhara. A motley array of resistance forces soon assembled around former Emir Said Alim Khan and Uzbek strongman Ibragim Bek.[26] Trouble erupted in Khiva once again in March 1921, when the Turkestan Commission directed the overthrow of the Khorezm Republic and proclaimed the Soviet Socialist Republic of Khorezm. Much of the deposed Young Khivan leadership joined the resistance.

Just as tensions heightened in Turkestan, events elsewhere threatened the entire edifice of Bolshevik power in Russia. Concurrently engaged in a desperate war with Poland and liquidating remnants of the White forces in the Crimea, the Red Army was in dire need of additional manpower. To cope with the crisis, Moscow imposed conscription on Central Asian Muslims in the summer of 1920. Though aware of native reaction to the draft of 1916, the Red leadership, nonetheless, embarked on that risky course. Publicly, the Bolsheviks maintained that they had alleviated the oppressive conditions that had made military service unacceptable to the native populace in the past. Once again, heady optimism based on facile social analysis proved unfounded.

On 7 May, Frunze signed the directive to conscript 35,000 Central Asians. By August, approximately 25,000 native conscripts had entered the ranks. Local Soviets assumed full responsibility not only for conscript enrollment but for the moral and political reliability of every recruit. Frunze categorically refused the demands of Muslim Communists that distinct Muslim units be formed. To do so, Frunze asserted, would establish a harmful precedent encouraging separate units for every faith. Yet Frunze did not object to the creation of national units (which happened to be Muslim) of Uzbeks, Kirghiz, Turkomans, Tajiks, and so forth.[27] Frunze probably believed that the establishment of such national units, though seemingly risky in itself, would inhibit the spread of dangerous Pan-Islamic or Pan-Turkic tendencies. The recruitment campaign was so successful that national formations soon accounted for one-third of the Red Army's published strength in Turkestan.[28] However, the rapid infusion of Central Asians into the army entailed serious difficulties. On 10 October, *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* acknowledged great cultural and linguistic obstacles in the adaptation of Central Asians to military life and reported that reliable cadres must be placed among the *inorodtsy* (aliens) to ensure a successful transition.[29] Consistent with this position, the Red Army made some practical concessions to local customs and intensified its recruitment of native officers. In fact, a Central Muslim Military College had operated in Moscow and subsequently Kazan since January 1918 for the purpose of training Muslim officers, at first chiefly Tatars and Bashkirs. Political and military education received equal attention in the program. Commissions also became attainable through a Muslim Cavalry and Infantry Course which opened in Kazan in September 1919.[30]

Such palliative measures were scarcely sufficient, however, to make conscription a tolerable burden to peoples thoroughly unaccustomed either



Turkomans drinking tea in front of a dwelling, ca. 1890

with the concept of a service obligation or military regimentation. The result was predictable. Turmoil in Bukhara forced a postponement of the local draft until 1921.[31] Many Muslim draftees fled to the Basmachis, and the Bolsheviks were forced to disarm the 1st Uzbek Cavalry Brigade, once considered a model native unit.[32] Native political cadres were in short supply. Frunze, in a telegram of 29 May, attributed an unspecified unfortunate incident in the 11th Tatar Regiment to the diversion of political workers from field units to civic work with the populace.[33] Evidence of mounting mistrust between Russians and native Central Asians abounded. In October, 640 men of the Muslim Kazan Regiment defected to the Basmachis.[34] In turn, in 1920, the Russian 27th Rifle Regiment mutinied in Vernoe, and demanded the disarming of Muslim units of the Red Army.[35]

The chief result of the conscription decree, aside from its failure, was to swell the ranks of the resistance to 30,000 strong during the summer of 1920.[36] The Basmachi movement also received a boost in political support. The Bashkir nationalist, Zeki Validov, former president of the short-lived Bashkir Autonomous Republic in the southern Urals region, cast his lot with the resistance after Moscow disbanded his government. Even more important, Enver Pasha, invited by the Soviet government to visit Bukhara in 1921, decided to support his ethnic and religious brethren in Central Asia by joining the resistance. A former minister of war of the Ottoman Empire and only forty years old, Enver Pasha had served as chief of the General Staff in Turkey during the Second Balkan War of 1913 and brought a wealth of tactical and organizational knowledge, as well as a handful of Turkish officers, to the cause. His first political gesture was to proclaim a

holy war against the Bolsheviks and name himself commander of the armies of Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khiva. At the peak of his success in the spring of 1922, Enver held virtually all of western Bukhara and much of the east.[37]

Just what Enver might have achieved had he survived beyond 1922 (when he died in battle) is a subject of scholarly disagreement. Although one scholar of the Basmachis, Martha Olcott, contends that Enver "could have upset the Bolshevik plans for a Soviet Turkestan," another, Glenda Fraser, points out that Enver himself probably doubted the probability of his success.[38]

Even as Enver's fortunes reached their zenith, powerful forces gathered to oppose him.[39] By late 1922, the Red Army in Turkestan numbered from 100,000 to 150,000 men, including a mixture of regular and irregular forces.[40] No longer forced to concentrate manpower in other theaters, the Bolsheviks turned the military tide irreversibly in their favor. Moreover, the death of leaders such as Enver Pasha and continued overtures by the Bolsheviks to independent tribal chieftains wore down the resolve of the resistance. Though weakened, the Basmachis proved a resilient and dangerous foe. By the account (perhaps inflated) of the emir of Bukhara, there remained 60,000 Basmachis in Turkestan, among them 21,000 in Bukhara and 26,000 in the Fergana Valley.[41] Fighting would continue sporadically in many localities in the decade to come, but Bukhara and the Fergana Valley would constitute the most enduring pockets of resistance.

The Evolution of Red Army Tactics and Strategy

Due in large measure to confused lines of authority and political fragmentation, the struggle to establish Soviet power in Central Asia had a most inauspicious beginning. Indeed, in January 1918, the People's Commissar for Military Affairs, Osipov, himself led an uprising against the Red regime in Turkestan. This calamity triggered a military reorganization resulting in a clearer division of functions. Organization and administration fell to the Military Commissariat, while the Supreme Operational Staff (headed by a party member) assumed charge of field operations.[42]

Through careful study of their combat operations during the period 1920—22, Red Army analysts concluded that the character of the war in Central Asia diverged significantly from that in other theaters. As D. Zuev observed in 1922, although Western warfare was characterized by mechanized infantry, in view of "the roadless mountains and deserts of the Central Asian theaters, and the backwards and disorganized enemy in Turkestan, the old principle—the training of a steadfast and calm individual soldier—has not outlived its usefulness." While official guidance for commanders in Central Asia advised adherence to the general principles established in the official regulations of the Workers and Peasants Red Army, it also reminded commanders that the regulations did not prescribe stereotypical solutions to all tactical situations. Zuev cautioned readers of the official military periodical, *Voennyi rabotnik Turkestana*, to bear in mind the lessons of

imperial Russian campaigns in the deserts of Central Asia and, in particular, the importance of wells and sources of fuel.[43]

The topic of mountain warfare also drew special attention. Analyst V. Lavrenev warned that no matter how able a commander may have been in other theaters, he "will be entirely unprepared here [the mountainous zones of Central Asia] and in most instances will begin with a series of blunders." Lavrenev placed emphasis on flank security operating in parallel movement with main units and the role of advance and rear patrols. He also noted the value of strong, hardy soldiers and native units in the demanding mountain environment. Because supply trains would often be unable to follow units, soldiers would have to carry their own packs and equipment. Furthermore, the decentralized character of mountain combat mandated "the broadest initiative" by ordinary soldiers. Perhaps most important, attacks depended upon expert fire control due to the inevitable dispersal of troops in broken terrain and difficulties of orientation. Thus, advised Lavrenev, commanders should personally direct machine-gun fire.[44]

In 1923, Sergei Kamenev, the commander in chief of the armed forces from 1919 to 1924, penned what was probably the most coherent and comprehensive general prescription for victory. Following an inspection tour in May and June, Kamenev summarized his conclusions in a secret document titled "System for the Struggle with the Basmachis." In accord with a well-established pattern of conduct, he called first for the military occupation of important population centers, the defense of key railroad lines, communications, and industry and also strikes against known Basmachi lairs. As a given area came under government control, responsibility would be shifted from the military to appropriate political officials.[45]

In principle, Red Army units aimed to isolate and destroy hostile bands or, if this proved impossible, to curtail their flight to remote sanctuaries or across the frontier into Afghanistan. To execute this policy, military units in the field had to be as flexible and mobile as circumstances allowed. As explained by Kamenev, because elusive Basmachi bands operated as raiding parties, the Reds formed light irregular cavalry formations known as "flying detachments" (*letuchie otriady*) for the purpose of maintaining communications lines among garrisons and attacking Basmachi bases. Such forces varied in size from a platoon to a division (in theory up to about 2,000 men, though probably fewer in practice) and became the "main active force" in combating Basmachi bands. To enhance the opportunity for surprise, flying detachments seldom remained in one place for long and they usually operated in concert with other forces. Supporting the flying detachments were "raiding detachments" (*istrebitel'nye otriady*), local formations of a more partisan character. Their mission included reconnaissance and harassment of the enemy. Red forces regularly conducted sweeps to flush out Basmachis in hiding.[46]

As a rule, based on Frunze's advice, the Reds managed to avoid spreading their forces too thin. Frunze insisted that only concentrated forces would be capable of carrying out the pursuit and destruction of Basmachi bands.

In contrast, small outposts in every trading village would be too weak either to defend or attack. At the same time, steam locomotives, pulling wagons of soldiers and firing platforms armored with pressed cotton bales, patrolled the railroad net.[47]

Though not central elements in the anti-Basmachi campaigns, aerial and naval assets played a significant supporting role. Red Army airplanes performed an invaluable service in a reconnaissance role and, occasionally, in combat. Although strafing and bombing seldom resulted in great physical harm to the enemy, their psychological effects were considerable. Late in the war, the Soviets were the first to employ airlift in combat.[48] In addition, naval forces provided transport across the Aral Sea. Since traffic on the Amu River was insecure as long as the Basmachis held Bukhara and Khiva, Frunze maintained a combat fleet on the Amu River consisting of nine steamers, two vessels powered by internal combustion, and a cutter.[49]

As in the imperial campaigns in Central Asia during the nineteenth century, the support of units in the field was a paramount concern. Initially, Red supply trains carried not only ammunition and provisions for the soldiers but often their belongings and even their families. In general, units were reluctant to operate at any significant distance from their sources of supply. Only gradually did troops become accustomed to traveling in relatively light, mobile columns. Because of requirements for animals and forage, supply trains were large and cumbersome. Four-wheeled wagons could scarcely move at all in the mountains. The mundane but crucial art of loading camels had been forgotten.[50]

Resupply in the field required meticulous preparation and reliable communications. The heliograph, virtually a forgotten technology by World War I, proved extremely useful across an expansive territory possessed of minimal railroad and telegraph networks (and these vulnerable to interdiction). Contemporary radios were extremely bulky and did not bear up well during difficult mountain marches. In contrast, the heliograph, particularly lighter models designed for field use, was easily transported by two donkeys and reliable under most conditions.[51] A miniature version used by cavalry required a mirror only three inches in diameter, yet permitted a small unit to remain in contact with its parent force up to a distance of fifteen miles.[52]

The greatest impediment to rapid movement in the mountains and desert was artillery. Heavy guns and even modest stocks of ammunition could virtually paralyze a force advancing over difficult terrain. As early as 1921, Red Army analysts reviewed the experience of the Russian Imperial Army in Central Asia and advised the use of portable mountain guns which, unlike field guns, could achieve a steep enough angle of fire to hit elevated targets. In addition, the sharp trajectory of descent of the projectiles magnified their effects upon impact.[53] Perhaps the principal role of machine guns and artillery in the mountains was to provide covering fire to support the advance of infantry into dead ground as they closed on the enemy.[54]

Mobility and the application of combat power in Central Asia naturally depended upon solid intelligence for their effective employment against the

Basmachis. In 1925, analyst P. Antonov wrote an article in *Krasnaia zvezda* titled, "Tactics of the Struggle with the Basmachis," in which he faulted Soviet understanding of local conditions. He stressed the value of intensive interrogations of prisoners and soldier interviews to assist in the identification and location of Basmachi bands. Further, he cautioned, if permitted to retreat in peace, defeated Basmachi bands would regroup and return. Only unremitting military pressure could ensure their submission. Similarly, the simple disbanding of surrendering Basmachi groups offered insufficient guarantee of their future conduct. Antonov called for their assignment to specific locales for supervision. In other words, victories in the field alone constituted a mere prelude to solving the root problem of population control.[55]

Frunze maintained that the central problem was not to defeat the Basmachis militarily, a painstaking but relatively certain endeavor (if other conditions were met), but to convince the population that the Basmachis were the enemy—or at least that they could not be victorious.[56] In June 1920, at Kuibyshev's initiative, the first Congress of Political Workers of Turkestan met to determine the best means of propagandizing among Muslims in Red Army units. The congress resolved that political work must reflect the cultural and religious preferences of the native population and strive to eliminate all manifestations of national chauvinism among the colonists. To implement this plan, the party established party schools in every oblast (district) of Turkestan. Schools opened under the auspices of the political sections of every Red Army front, army, and division. The Turkestan Front's political section alone operated party schools for Russians, Muslims, Magyars, and Germans.[57] Political action in the Red Army sometimes entailed the dissolution and reorganization of whole units and the creation of others. Kuibyshev, for example, oversaw the disarming and disbanding of the Soviet 4th Regiment for the commission of crimes against the native populace.[58]

Inside and outside the army, the most sensitive propaganda objective of Red political workers was to neutralize Islam as a source of resistance strength. Aware that early attempts at antireligious agitation had proved clumsy and counterproductive, the Soviets elected to proceed patiently and curtail frontal attacks on Islamic institutions. The revised approach emphasized economic development and secular public education to promote the training of native cadres. Native religious institutions, such as courts and schools, would for a time continue to function. The Reds also found to their dismay that the members of the indigenous cultures in the area were intolerant of efforts to broaden the range of social roles for women. For example, members of the Military Revolutionary Council for the Turkestan Front conceded in reports in 1926 that attempts to declare women of any age fit for employment in accord with Soviet law proved futile in the face of local custom.[59]

Overall, the Reds invested considerable resources in education and propaganda. They pioneered the staging of mass political spectacles. Kuibyshev mobilized two so-called agitation trains, the "Rosa Luxumberg" and "Red

East," to make whistle-stop tours on behalf of the revolution.[60] By 1925, the Turkestan authorities staged political rallies before crowds as large as 60,000.[61] More pragmatic measures included tax assistance for peasants in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, delivery of seed to farmers, extension of offers of amnesty, and temporary concessions such as the restoration of Muslim schools and property in December 1921.[62]

Economic conditions were of no small significance, and Lenin's New Economic Policy brought much-needed relief from state requisitions of agricultural goods and draconian restrictions on the conduct of commerce. In 1922, Moscow increased its direct control of the regional party apparatus and purged, for example, approximately 1,000 of 16,000 members of the Bukharan Communist Party. In March 1923, the newly formed Soviet republics of Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khorezm agreed to a joint economic plan to stabilize conditions throughout the region.[63] Though by no means a total success, the political effort played a vital role in reducing native antagonism toward the regime.

Case One: The Fergana Resistance

Throughout the course of the struggle in Central Asia, the largest and most persistent center of resistance was the populous Fergana Valley, scene of prolonged fighting during Russia's conquest of the region a half century earlier. The local topography was well suited to the Basmachi style of warfare. Steep mountains gouged by deep ravines surrounded the valley, which was crossed by numerous irrigation canals.

The resistance in Fergana consisted of many small, independent factions organized along clan lines—a fact reflected in the conduct of battle, which took place in isolated valleys and mountain pockets rather than along a coherent front. The resistance dispersed its efforts and seldom undertook concerted actions. Although there was little coordination among the Basmachi groups, each maintained strong internal discipline. The Fergana Basmachis generally lacked late-model weapons but typically were good horsemen whose most successful tactics were the ambush and small raid. A Red Army account depicts a classic instance of a Basmachi ambush in November 1920. A band of 400 Basmachis struck a 95-man column of the Turkestan Rifle Regiment from the flanks and rear a short distance from Kokand. The Red infantrymen were unable to form a defense quickly enough to repel the assault, and a small, mounted rear guard disintegrated. Then, the attackers captured the unit supply train and a machine gun, vanishing as suddenly as they struck.[64] This solitary incident, of course, meant little, but multiplied many times over, it suggests the character of the conflict and the staying power of the Basmachis.

The Fergana Basmachis often labored as peasants by day and operated secretly by night. Some, especially during the hard winter of 1921—22, became "seasonal Bolsheviks," accepting provisions from the government and biding their time until spring.[65] A Red Army estimate of 1920 identified

12 separate Basmachi bands with a total of 5,650 armed fighters. Red strength in the valley was roughly 4,000 to 5,000 regulars, supplemented by a few Communist Party members and local militias. Red military actions, hampered by the lack of a clear command relationship between garrisons and a capable administrative apparatus, accomplished little.[66]

The most visible resistance leader to emerge in Fergana was Madamin Bek, a former Soviet militia commander in the town of Margelan. Madamin sought allies wherever he could find them, embracing Bashkir and Tatar intellectuals as well as renegade White forces. The most significant among the latter was the self-proclaimed Russian Peasant Army, under a one-time Red officer, Konstantin Monstrov, which formed in opposition to government grain requisitions. By September 1919, Madamin had established his own rudimentary administration and in October reached agreement with other major Basmachi leaders, including Irgash, Kurshirmat, and Khalkhodzha, to establish regions of command. Local commanders, called *kurbashi*, combined civil and military powers. Madamin then proclaimed the Fergana Provisional Government with himself at its head and Monstrov as his deputy. Another Russian served as his military chief of staff.[67] The British War Office credited Madamin with a force of 4,000 men armed with Berdan and Turkish rifles. Irgash commanded about 1,500 men and Khalkhodzha about 1,000. An Indian Office report claimed the Basmachis possessed machine guns but no artillery.[68]

The combined forces of Madamin and Monstrov captured Jalalabad and laid siege to the Red garrison at Andizhan in September. However, weak discipline and poor coordination rendered the siege ineffective, and the 500-man garrison under V. N. Sidorov exploited tactical opportunities to break the encirclement. As Monstrov's forces began to disintegrate, Madamin's Basmachis retreated under the pressure of Red counterattacks, and some individual bands surrendered.[69]

Born of a common enemy rather than any fundamental shared purpose, this inherently unstable coalition unraveled within a year. Madamin's call for a holy war, for example, could hardly fail to antagonize his Russian allies. Still, the central cause of the rebel collapse was the end of the military isolation of Turkestan. The arrival of Red reinforcements and the Turkestan Commission drastically altered military and political conditions. The success of new policies in Fergana corresponded closely to the degree of class differentiation in any given local populace. Urban areas, which were more economically developed, proved more receptive than remote areas such as the Lokai Valley or the Kara Kum desert, where life was virtually unchanged from a century before.

By March 1920, Madamin was in irreversible retreat. Elements of his defeated forces were soon reorganized by the Reds into the Russian 1st Uzbek Cavalry Brigade—a potentially potent example of Muslims allying themselves with the Red Army (as, in fact, thousands of Volga Tatars and Bashkirs had during the defeat of the White armies in the Southern Urals and Siberia).[70]

Such attempts at mass conversion, however, were seldom lasting. Many surrendering Basmachis sooner or later returned to the resistance. One such group, under the command of Rakhmankul, defected back to the Basmachis after a month and a half.[71] The incidence of disciplinary problems and defections led local military authorities to abandon the policy of preserving entire Basmachi bands intact and to the intensification of political indoctrination of recent converts.

Madamin himself became a Red emissary to other Basmachi chieftains but was murdered by a former ally. This episode steeled Frunze's resolve to press the attack even more. He strengthened Red garrisons, ceased all negotiations, and announced that anyone entering the service of the Basmachis would be summarily shot. The centralization of military and civil authority followed in the summer of 1920 with the creation of a military council in every district. In the Fergana region, for example, the Military Council of the 2d Turkestan Division received full dictatorial powers.[72]

Unified authority made administration more effective, and subsequent success was as much the result of political as military acumen. Frunze was keenly appreciative of the political, ethnic, and social origins of the conflict and understood that defeat of the native resistance depended heavily upon alleviating outstanding grievances and mistrust. Accordingly, in 1920, Frunze called for a maximum political effort among the Fergana population, beginning with land and water reform. In addition, during March 1920, the party conducted seventy-eight meetings, staged eighteen lectures and twenty-one discussions, circulated copies of its reports in Uzbek as well as Russian, and began to establish public schools.[73]

Although the effects of such programs defy precise measurement, policy reform and propaganda apparently exerted a calming influence on popular opinion. Yet, as happened throughout Central Asia, the native reaction to conscription in the summer of 1920 infused new life into the Fergana resistance, where Kurshirmat gathered about 6,000 fighters to renew the struggle. Many Muslims drafted by the Soviet government fled to join the resistance, and the Bolsheviks found it necessary to disarm the 1st Uzbek Cavalry Brigade.[74] Benefiting from local support and good intelligence, the resistance again dominated the countryside.

The Red Army responded aggressively but found itself embroiled in a protracted conflict. Although Red units could prevail in any conventional tactical encounter, resistance remained widespread throughout 1921, especially in the eastern Fergana region (modern Tajikistan). The business of hunting down elusive guerrilla bands across great distances and into remote mountainous defiles proved risky and arduous.[75] Yet relentless pressure by Red forces gradually bore fruit. By one estimate, from February to October 1922, Red forces eliminated 119 of approximately 200 Basmachi groups, killing over 4,000 men in the process. The following year, the Fergana Revolutionary Military Soviet organized mobile detachments operating from garrisons in all the key administrative centers. Further, it established parallel local administration for Russian and native quarters in mixed cities.[76] By the

end of the year, Kurshirmat fled to Afghanistan, and not more than 2,000 Basmachis remained in the valley.[77]

Thus, in 1923, Fergana lost its designation as a front, although sporadic fighting persisted. In the summer of 1925, Ibragim Bek attempted to revive the resistance but was unable to organize tribal leaders—most of whom still operated over small territories with full autonomy—into an effective coalition. As a result, lacking secure bases and permanent forage, resistance bands receded into the most distant corners of the Fergana Valley.[78]

Case Two: The Resistance in Bukhara

As of the summer of 1920, no clearer impediment to the establishment of Red rule could be found than Bukhara, where events in Fergana sparked a sympathetic explosion. Kuibyshev contended that the strength of the Basmachi movement in Central Asia depended above all upon the political posture of Bukhara and Afghanistan, which had been drawing nearer one another politically. Basmachi control of Bukhara, which lay across major lines of communication in Turkestan, was a threat to Soviet power in the region. In turn, the disposition of Afghanistan, a potential sanctuary as well as a conduit of support for Muslim resistance, might well hinge on events in Bukhara.[79] Thus, possession of Bukhara was crucial. Under the emir, Bukhara could serve as a rallying point for opposition to Soviet power; in Red hands, it could become a staging area of revolution in Asia.

Bolstered by the strong support of the Muslim clergy, Bukharan Emir Alim Khan moved to consolidate his power. He conducted an unprecedented mobilization to raise an army that, according to Red estimates (probably inflated), consisted of 8,275 infantry, 7,580 cavalry, and up to 27,000 irregulars.[80] With the aid of a motley assortment of fugitive Whites, Turks, and a few Afghans, the emir levied young Bukharans into his army and established garrisons in Bukhara, Khatyrchi-Kermine and Kitab-Shakhrisiabe.

Given its political and military significance, as well as its complexity, the Red Army's Bukharan operation stands as an instructive case study for analysis of the war with the Basmachis. At the start of the operation, Frunze's Turkestan Front had responsibility for an expanse of 2,000 kilometers from east to west, across which it was concurrently suppressing a peasant uprising in Semireche, fighting Basmachis in the Fergana Valley, lending military support to the newly established Khorezm Peoples Republic, and fomenting a revolt against the emir in Bukhara. His resources stretched to the utmost, Frunze depended upon achieving complete surprise in his assault on Bukhara, a result accomplished in part by a Soviet emissary to the emir, who carried on negotiations up to the eve of the Red offensive.[81]

For his operation against Bukhara, Frunze had at his disposal from 6,000 to 7,000 infantry, 2,300 cavalry, 35 light and 5 heavy guns, 8 armored cars, 5 armored trains, and 11 aircraft. In addition, Red units expected to benefit from planned uprisings by radical elements in Kata-Kurgan, Samarkand, and Novyi Chardzhui. Frunze's requests for additional Red Army

Bukhara, as it appeared around 1890

units went unanswered because of the demands of concurrent Russian operations against the White and Polish armies. As a result, he resorted to the formation of national units, beginning with the 1st Muslim Regiment and including armed political and railroad workers.[82]

Frunze's plan emerged in two orders and hinged on a simultaneous strike executed by four independent operational groups. To ensure absolute secrecy, nothing was written down or communicated by phone. The first order, promulgated on 12 August, designated assembly areas for units assigned to each group, and the second, issued on 25 August, described their coordinated movements.[83] The Kagan Group, consisting of the 4th Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Eastern Muslim Regiment, and militia from several local garrisons, was to advance northward on the main axis of attack from Kagan to Old Bukhara and Star-Makhassa. Its aim was to destroy the emir's main field force and, above all, deny the emir and his government any chance of escape. The commander, one Comrade Belov, was to await word of a successful uprising in Chardzhui as the cue to attack.

A second, independent column was to support the Red-instigated uprising in Chardzhui, after which Red Army and Bukharan cavalry forces would sweep north to take Kara-Kul and hold the railroad line at Iakka-tut to prevent the emir's flight in that direction. At the same time, other cavalry elements would seize the crossings of the Amu River and Burdalyk and cut the railroad line from Old Bukhara to Termez. The Chardzhui Group consisted of a rifle regiment, a rifle battalion, a cavalry squadron, and a detachment of Bukharans.

Two additional groups, assembled at Katta-Kurgan and Samarkand, were to operate to the east of Old Bukhara. The first group, including a cavalry regiment and squadron and a detachment of Red Bukharans, was to occupy Khatyrchi, Ziaetdin, and Kermine along the road from Samarkand to Old Bukhara. The second group, consisting of a rifle regiment, a cavalry division, an independent cavalry brigade, and an engineer company, was charged with the defeat of the emir's forces along the Shakhrisiabe-Kitab axis and seizure of the Kushka River territory.[84]

The Bukharan operation began as planned with the seizure of Old Chardzhui on the night of 28—29 August by a force designated the 8th Bukharan Revolutionary Detachment (see map 10). Cavalry elements from Chardzhui assumed covering positions on the right bank of the Amu River at Marazym and Burdalyk on 30—31 August, while a special detachment, including subunits of the 5th Rifle Regiment, advanced north to Kara-Kul. From the east, Red forces marched westward from Katta-Kurgan as far as Kizil Tepe and from Samarkand southward beyond Kitab and along the Kushka River. Farther south and west, the Amu flotilla patrolled the Amu River along the Afghan frontier to seal off possible escape routes.

Meanwhile, on 29 August, the Kagan Group pressed north to Old Bukhara in two columns. The right column, made up of the 10th and 12th Rifle Regiments, the 1st Cavalry Regiment, and an armored car detachment, moved along the main highway and parallel to the railroad to within sight of the city's Karshin gates. The left column, comprised of the 1st Eastern Muslim Rifle Regiment, a cavalry detachment, and a special forces regiment (*polk osobogo naznacheniia*), advanced and then halted before the Kara-Kul gates. Neither column encountered serious resistance en route, and both reached the city environs by evening.

Operations bogged down against Bukhara's old but massive walls, which were comprised of 130 defensive towers and 11 gates.[85] On 31 August and 1 September, the 25th, 26th, and 43d Aviation Reconnaissance Detachments harassed the defenders with a light aerial bombardment. Nevertheless, penetration of the city walls, roughly ten meters high and five meters thick, depended first upon fire from 122-mm and 152-mm artillery pieces, some of which were mounted on an armored train. The Reds concentrated artillery fire on the city gates, which were less formidable than the walls. In this instance, however, the misapplication of force exposed the inexperience of Red officers. Although no effective defensive counterfire impeded their closing to virtually point-blank range, the Reds were content to commit their artillery fire from a distance of five to six kilometers, with a corresponding diminu-